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ABSTRACT

The findings of a survey of attitude studies to determine the effect of students' attitudes on communication competence as they enter the work force and develop their careers are reported in this paper. The paper explains how attitude improvement is an effective management tool in controlling costly absenteeism, output, job productivity, work performance, and turnover, as well as in sustaining organizational commitment. It then suggests that attitude is an important component in the recruiting process, during inservice training, in maintaining internal morale, and in the molding of a reputation that reflects the total organizational image. The paper also focuses on the traditional concept of a caring emotional climate of empathy, affiliation, and pride in the company, as well as clarity of objectives, as necessary ingredients of positive attitude formation, and discusses the effects of a positive attitude in dealing with personal/professional frustration, leadership behavior, team integration, and employee satisfaction with job, supervisor, and the organization as a whole. The paper concludes with a proposal for further research on individual attitude as a component of competence, and a recommendation for semiannual employee-employer workshops for implementing and maintaining a well-managed attitudinal environment. (Author/HOD)

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ABSTRACT

ATTITUDE: A COMPONENT OF COMPETENT PERFORMANCE

Because attitudes are our likes and dislikes, they may be perceived by others as either a positive or negative reaction to an idea, a belief, a concept, a policy, an issue, a person, a group, or to any happening in a specific milieu. Attitudes are mental conclusions that people make in a specific situation. Findings support the role of a personal positive attitude in communication competence in the professional arena. This study surveys the literature to determine the effect of attitude on communication competence of students as they enter the work force and as they proceed in the development of a successful career. The study explains how attitude improvement is an effective management tool in controlling costly absenteeism, output, job productivity, work performance, turnover, and in sustaining organizational commitment. The paper suggests that attitude is an important component in the recruiting process, during in-service training, in maintaining internal morale, and in the molding of a reputation that reflects the total organizational image. The paper focuses on the traditional concept of a caring emotional climate of empathy, affiliation, and pride in the company, as well as clarity of objectives as necessary ingredients of positive attitude formation. It discusses the effects of a positive attitude in dealing with personal/professional frustration, leadership behavior, team integration, employee satisfaction with job, supervisor, and the organization as a whole. The study concludes with (1) a proposal for further research on individual attitude as a component of competence, and (2) a recommendation for semi-annual employee-employer workshops, possibly based on Jung's theory of behavioral typology for implementing and maintaining a well-managed attitudinal environment.

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Attitude: A Component of Competent Performance

Since attitude is considered one of the most important variables in the corporate world, it has received a great deal of attention in marketing literature. The concept of attitudes is another search to understand individual differences, (Kiesler, Collins, and Miller, 1969). Allport (1935, p. 810) defines this abstract concept as a "mental and neutral state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related." Rokeach, (1966-67, pp. 529-50) contends that attitude is an individual disposition not only toward an object, but also toward a situation. Because attitudes are our likes and dislikes, they may be perceived by others as either a positive or negative reaction to an idea, a belief, a concept, a policy, a procedure, an issue, a person, a group, or the manner in which a person sees the world on a certain issue at a specific time (Zimbardo, Ebbesen & Maslach, 1977, pp. 19-25).

We wonder why persons hold fast to certain attitudes. We are especially curious when another person's attitude about a person, subject, or situation differs from our own. One study demonstrates that attitude is related to information and experience (Bruvold, 1973). According to Leon Festinger's (1963) reasoning, past experience influences attitude formation. Festinger`s theory of cognitive dissonance maintains that human beings wish for a high

degree of consistency between what they perceive to be true and what they do. Using this line of reasoning, a discrepancy between knowledge and action, produces discomforting disharmony. Striving to maintain a feeling of comfort and consonance, individuals tend to be comfortable living in an unchanging environment, one that is surrounded by familiar status quo happenings. As Hedberg (1981, p. 4) points out, "Learning in stable environments is like mental bricklaying, in that pieces of knowledge add to each other." Unfortunately, changing reality causes a feeling of instability in the work environment. Unconsciously, people fear change and the unknown. Today, we are living in a world of two extremes--the desire for the status quo and the reality of change. In the information age of today, our working environment may never be familiar to us again. As John Naisbitt (1982, p. 1) reports in his book Megatrends, "As a society, we have been moving from the old to the new. And we are still in motion. . . . It is no longer possible for traditional methods and status quo to survive."

Dealing with this psychological impact of change and inconsistency is an important area of concern for corporations. Kenneth E. Boulding, (1979) Director of the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder emphasizes:

> Survival of an individual, a species, an organization, or a society depends in the long run on its ability to deal with the unfamiliar, (change) the capacity to know where we are in places we have never been, and to assess situations in which we have had no experience. (p. 8)

Attitudes are sorely affected by changing factors and a composite of inconsistent variables -- time, the economy and working conditions, work values, pay, promotion, co-workers, supervisors, job security (Lawler, 1973; Locke, 1975; Smith, et al., 1979; Vroom, 1964). Thus, clearly, an attempt needs to be made to monitor the attitudes of employees and to support the employees in the insecurity of the work environment. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984, p. 11) indicate that ". . . the acquisition of communication competence is necessary to fulfill the general need of all humans to control their environment. . . ." A human being needs a modicum of control and security to maintain equilibrium. To satisfy this unmet need, a well designed attitude survey could be an invaluable management tool to explore the insecuritites and questions that concern employees (Kesselman, 1984).

From a survey of fifty Fortune 500 companies, Ketchum Public Relations concluded that companies that conduct employee attitude studies are far less likely to have strikes than those that do not. The survey revealed that the monitoring of attitudes is an imperative preventative of out-of-control dissension and strikes (Aiello, 1983, p. 21).

The purpose of this paper is to survey the literature in an attempt to identify basic components of organizational and human characteristics that determine the need for attitude monitoring. Such monitoring is needed to sustain and maintain employee

cooperation, commitment and competence in an inevitably changing environment.

Survey of the Literature

L.L. Thurstone (1931) placed the concept "attitude" on a continuum that ranged from positive to negative and from favorable to unfavorable. He defined attitude as "the affect for or against a psychological object." Environment appears to have a definite causal link to attitude. A survey of the literature, indicates that the degree to which an organization grows and prospers depends upon its adaptability and its flexibility in the meeting of needs in its surrounding environment (Gardner, 1965). Thus, it follows that as supporting, external environments demand change, the behavioral attitudes of personnel must blend and "fit" into this new context of experience (March and Olsen, 1975; Hedberg, 1981). The word "context" defines the total situation, background or environment. Kurt Lewin recognized the need to understand the context or the specific environment in explaining individual attitudes. Lewin's findings were influenced by Gestalt psychology as he acknowledged the effect of the psychological context of the individual's "life space" on attitudes (Shaw & Costanzo, 1970; Lewin, 1951). Stan Davis, professor at Boston University makes the point that in order to create corporate cultures that respond to the feelings of the people, it is vital to monitor the environment and allow for contradictory approaches. (Poppy, 1981).In this

connection, Deutsch (1968) points to two related environments: the objective environment and the psychological environment. According to Deutsch, the psychological environment exists for the individual, as each person has a personal perception of his/her unique reality. For instance, a job which may look appealing to one person would not appeal to another. Thus, the "life space" or environment-as-perceived-by-the-individual may be the most valuable link to actual attitude surveys (Erbring and Young, 1980).

Following this contention, how can we be certain, when doing an in-plant attitude survey, that we touch upon the individual's personal, psychological environment. Erbring and Young (1980) report that individuals are likely to have the same attitudes as those of their friends, families, fellow-workers, and fellow-union or professional association:

> Campbell and Alexander (1965) and Alexander and McDill (1976) argue that the effects of group structure on individual outcomes are mediated through interaction with "significant others" and thus should be represented by the mean values of the attributes of relevant peers rather than of the entire group. (p. 27)

Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962) postulate that "man's social actions--whether the actions involve religious behavior, ways of earning a living, politics, or buying and selling goods--are directed by his attitudes" (p. 139). In this instance, Thorndike's law of effect (1932) "Pleasure stamps in and pain stamps out," may be a key element in attaining a positive mental

attitude in the work environment. The foregoing premise is supported by Zimbardo-Ebbesen's (1969) theory that reward and punishment should be one of the most effective means of changing attitudes. The reward of being satisfied with the type of work one does can bring about observable positive interpersonal relations with co-workers (Motowidio, 1984). Moreover, the reward of job satisfaction has been cited as an important determinant in developing a potential positive emotional climate. An ambiance of interpersonal sensitivity, empathy, affiliation, and listening to others is reflective and distinct in the total organizational culture environment (Motowidio, 1984).

From a phenomenological perspective, there are many determinants of personal attitudes concerning job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. In short, it seems that the concept of hedonism would apply here as we know from experience that what is pleasurable for one person is not necessarily pleasurable for another person (Jones & Davis, 1965). Furthermore, the concept of "satisfaction" is defined from each individual's perceptual viewpoint. Actually, it is difficult to know which comes first the "chicken or the egg" in attitude evolution. However, from empirical studies, it ap pears that attitude change is constant. Lauer, (1974, p. 512) in relating to the phenomenon of our culture and the transformation of attitudes concerning family relationships, occupation, stress, status and health, notes that

"The world we live in is changing so fast it leaves me breathless at times." Without question, there is dissonance in the minds of employees when on the one hand, it is imperative to accept change in order to survive and keep in tune with a changing market, and on the other hand, it is difficult to avoid inner, silent rebellion against change because of personal insecurity. Contradiction between these opposing feelings can create a feeling of helplessness and anxiousness as well as loss of control in the working climate. Indeed, there is evidence in the literature that uneasiness over external change brings about internal anxiety (Feinberg, 1983). These feelings of anxiety may eventually cause job absenteeism, psychosomatic illness, ulcers, etc. (Beck & Hillmar, 1984). In some cases, companies are hiring doctors to deal with employee stress. However, employees are more likely to worry about strikes than about stress (The Economist, 1984), which varies with each type of work environment. Nowhere is stress more noticeable than in the work of air traffic controllers Robert Rose, M.D., of the University of Texas Medical School, studied 416 controllers for three years and found that job perception is involved in stress. Furthermore, he found that illness, whether physical or mental, is directly related to an employee's attitude toward work (Ornish, 1985). Leo Burnett Company, Inc., the largest ad agency in Chicago, takes the stress factor into account; it wants its employees to use all of their energies on getting well.

Its policy handbook states that after employees have been with the company for two years they will receive full salary whenever they are ill (Levering, Moskowitz, & Katz, 1984, p. 38). Many successful companies have made it a point to incorporate change in their program as smoothly and as painlessly as possible by informing employees of the need for change and by explaining how this change will benefit both them and the company. It follows that employees are apt to have a positive attitude toward anything that benefits them personally. Furthermore, if the word concerning an impending change comes directly from management rather than through the grapevine, it tends to reduce stress and to promote a feeling of team spirit.

Surveys by upper management indicate that managerial skills rated most important in the corporate development process are attitudes, communication, interpersonal skills and motivation.

> Levis (1984), characterizes the most effective manager as one having interpersonal skills for appealing to the employees intelligence, logic and emotions. Levis demonstrates the necessity of a manager's "motivating others to motivate themselves," since people become productive when they want to. (p. 23)

Realistically speaking, managers must have the flexibility to adopt techniques and modern methods to work with the changing work force of the nineties. Since the last decade there has been an increasing number of female corporate executives, as well as racial and cultural minorities and handicapped persons to integrate into

team membership (Gardner, 1985). At this time, between 15 and 20 percent of the Managers at Apple Computer, Inc. are women or minorities (Levering, Moskowitz, and Katz, 1984, p. 14). The question will need to be asked of managers at all organizational levels, "Is this manager a big enough person to treat this heterogenous population with trust and respect?" Another question might be, "Can this person manage change adroitly by quelling negative prejudices at departmental levels?" Not only must a manager treat people equally, he must be sensitive to their insecurity and to their fear of change and the unfamiliar (Raudsepp, 1984).

The monitoring of rapid environmental transformation requires more than effective managerial techniques; it demands active involvement in coping successfully with attitudinal and behavioral work patterns. With this view in mind, any change factor must be tapped and positively supported by managerial attitudes in order to execute policies and procedures of upper management (Whitney & Smith, 1983). Most recently, Nelton (1985) re-emphasized the supreme importance of feedback in a corporate department. He implied that feedback should be given only when the intention is to be helpful. He supports this positive rigidity of feedback in order to bring about coalition building in this heterogenous atmosphere.

In order for a manager to be able emotionally to disseminate

positive feedback toward change, he must (and this is possibly more important than any other quality) have a healthy self-concept. Today, it would be desirable for a prospective manager to undergo personality and interpersonal skills testing as an important part of his management training. Employees are more likely to follow a role model whom they respect. For instance, individuals will be more willing to think like a manager who is his own person (Namec, 1985). Furthermore, employees are more willing to accept change if their manager, whom they respect, has an analytical "can't lose" attitude (Wright, 1985) and is determined to accomplish the task at hand.

Idealistically, a manager needs to have a "first-class" self-concept and needs to exude a "first-class" attitude toward his subordinates (Raphel, 1983). James O'Toole, management professor, states in his book, Making America Work: "The manager who cannot demonstrate . . . competence to employees can no longer expect their respect. Instead of cracking a whip over employees, today's manager must adopt the role of an expert consultant" (Aiello, 1983, p. 19). Thus clearly, if a manager treats his employees as "first-class" individuals, he is likely to see improvement in the attitude and quality of the work place and subsequently, in productivity (Raphel, 1983). One case in point is the policy of Mo Siegel, founder of Celestial Seasonings, Inc., who stresses that "what is good for labor is good for management" (Levering, Moskowitz and

Katz 1984, pp. 40-44). He strives to help his employees feel better about their lives.

Another case is John J. Watson, founder of IBM, who established the policy of eliminating the distinction between subordinates and managers. Watson put blue collar workers on salary along with the white collar workers in 1958 (Levering, 1984 pp. 156-160). Employees felt that they had a career at IBM. "In one IBMer's" own words, he recalls, "This place has made me feel good, feel successful, ever since the first day I began. In return, I've always worked hard for them. It's a good match!" (Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt, 1985, p. 294). In his book A Business and Its Beliefs, Thomas J. Watson, Jr. alludes to the teachings of his father and mentor at IBM.

> I believe the real difference between success and failure in a corporation can very often be traced to the question of how well the organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people.

In still another case, the Killmorgen Corporation, makers of electro-optical instruments, motors, and controls, holds "People Meetings" once a month to encourage managers and subordinates to function as a team (Levering, Moskowitz & Katz, 1984, pp. 172-174). Weisbord (1985) reports that if a manager is trained to work as a coach, subordinates feel more "in," more influential, and more valued; consequently, they are motivated (p. 29) to produce. ALCOA, known for its traditional ways, has developed a training program by using computer simulation games for discrimination

sensitivity (Hymowitz, 1983). General Motors Corporation, in order to quell prejudice, has placed promotions in the hands of a committee of supervisors (Gardner, 1985).

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible for this type of empathic managerial training to be learned in the classroom. As an answer to this problem, Lean (1985) advocates internship programs for managers. As an intern, managers can learn on the job the humility, introspection and understanding of human behavior that they do not learn in the formal classroom.

Apple Computer, Inc. identified with the theory of managerial coaching, but has had difficulty finding managers that accept this philosophy. "We are looking for people who are coaches and team builders and expanders, not controllers of people" (Levering, Moskowitz and Katz, 1948, pp. 13-14). At Apple, Inc. they "Apple-ize" all of their people; i.e., whether they are working on the assembly line or sitting in the vice-president's chair, management lets them know that they are VIPs and invaluable to the mission of the corporation (11-14). Similarly, the president and CEO of Hewlett-Packard, John Young, who has been a general manager of his company for twenty-one years, still follows the team theory established by the founders Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard: "Successful businesses operate better when they operate as a team." (Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt, 1985). The differences in the late eighties in educational levels, educational attitudes, and

priorities of employees requires a different management approach. The workers of today are not the dedicated, lifetime employees that their fathers were; they are more loyal to self-fulfillment than company fulfillment. Their first priority is their personal career instead of the company's success (Aiello, 1983, p. 19). The concerns of employees of the eighties include personal recognition and worth, concern for health, adequate income, marital happiness, safety and job satisfaction (Campbell & Converse, 1972; Andrews & Withey, 1974, 1976; Allardt, 1978). In contrast, one study emphasizes that children of the baby boom generation still hold fundamental attitudes and values which are similar to those of their parents. The survey disclosed goals in this order: 1) personal and family relationships, 2) career success and 3) play and leisure (Brown, 1984). Perhaps the values have not changed that much; the most significant change may be their attitude about recognition of personal worth. Frederick Herzberg describes the employees of the eighties as "filled with hostility as they realize the gap between their psychological expectations and the real facts of the work world." ("The New Public Relation," 1981, p. 29).

Because people spend most of their waking hours on the job, they usually have intense attitudes toward their work. Attitudes can be very difficult to alter because of innumerable variables. One cause could be a personality trait developed in childhood that is more or less set in concrete. Another factor could be timing.

Between the ages of 21 and 65 as employees enter the trial, stabilization, and maintenance stages of their life position, different attitudes and performance can be identified with each career stage (Slocum Jr. and Cron, 1985; London, 1983; Rhodes & Doering, 1983; Sonnenfeld & Kotter, 1982).

Notwithstanding the employees already on the work force, the orientation of new employees to the policies, procedures, responsibilities, and benefits is a worthwhile effort. If the employer shows new employees that the company cares about their success on the job by explaining job expectations, the culture of the company, and future plans, the employer is establishing a sound groundwork (Addams, 1985).

Attention to recruitment

Ideally, a search for recruits will provide a screening process for the type of personality that would have the right attitude not only for a specific position, but also for a specific company. Hiring an applicant that has the same personal values and work ethic as the company is an important function in human resource foundation building. On the applied level, Proctor & Gamble, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Tandem and Walt Disney Productions offer models for stringently screening new recruits (Posner, Kouzes, and Schmidt, 1985). In the recruiting process, frequent reference is made to Korman's (1970) consistency theory which

identifies self-image and ability. According to Korman's theory, a self-image of excellence for a particular job tends to produce excellent performance. However, findings for successful recruiting have not been positive; expectations that are met in a job description have lesser impact than value attainment (Greenhaus, Seidel, & Marinis, 1983). Salancik and Pfeffer (1979) demonstrated that if a person takes a job because it is the only one available, he/she will be less positive than someone who has a choice of several possible positions.

Summary and Conclusion

Monitoring employee attitudes is more critical in the corporate environment than ever before. This article identifies basic components of organizational and human characteristics that determine the need for monitoring. It addresses a variety of cues that diagnose the disharmony that change brings. It further describes techniques for instilling positive attitudes. Essentially, attitude surveys, interpersonal sensitivity training and good communication are requisites. The article especially emphasizes the need for skilled managers with healthy self-concepts who have the ability to function as coaches and consultants and whose goal is to decrease the distinction between managers and subordinates.

Undoubtedly, continual effort is needed to develop attitude monitoring that will facilitate competent communication and promote

effective maintenance and coordination of employee-employer relationships.

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